

Reuniting Planning and Health

Planning for Healthy Communities resources pack



RESOURCE 5:

HEALTHIER URBAN ENVIRONMENTS – WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

A resource for people who want to know more about what integrated health and planning might look like in practice. It showcases examples of places where health has been considered throughout the planning process.



Planning for Healthy Communities resources pack

'The integration of planning, community planning, regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, combined with councils' existing functions, should provide a productive joined up approach that will enhance the role of local government as a natural partner in helping to deliver health improvements and addressing health inequalities at the community level.'

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, Northern Ireland ([Your Health Matters](#), 2013)

Welcome

This set of resources explains how better integration between health and spatial planning can help to create healthier places to live. It explains the opportunities for achieving this in Northern Ireland, and includes suggestions from elsewhere to illustrate potential ways forward.

These resources have been developed primarily for elected members, senior officers in local government, planners and public health practitioners. They will also be useful for community development practitioners and others who want to understand how the planning system can play a part in improving health and wellbeing locally.

Not everyone will want to know the same thing, and users will come with their own existing knowledge. To make the resources as useful as possible they have been written as standalone resources. This means that users can choose the ones they are most interested in, without having to start from the beginning of Resource 1 and work their way through to the end (you are of course welcome to do this too!).

Resource 1 is for people who want to learn more about the links between planning and health. It is a brief overview with lots of links to other more detailed reports and websites to get more information.	Resource 2 is for elected members and senior officers. It focuses on the role of planning corporately, and how a focus on health can help to achieve wider corporate objectives. This is particularly timely as councils consider how they will coordinate and organise their new responsibilities.	Resource 3 is for elected members, planners and public health practitioners. It explains the opportunities and constraints for considering health concerns within the planning process, and includes examples of evidence-based policies. There are lots of links to more information.	Resource 4 is for people who want to know more about how health can be considered within the existing and emerging Northern Ireland planning system.	Resource 5 is for people who want to know more about what integrated health and planning might look like in practice. It showcases examples of places where health has been considered throughout the planning process.
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Resource 5: Healthier urban environments – what do they look like?

Illustrates examples of where health and wellbeing have been an integral part of the design of a development, from large scale urban extensions to smaller housing schemes

Although these case studies reflect very different scales of development, there are some useful lessons to take away:

- all of the examples considered aspects of health and wellbeing from the outset of their design, whatever their scale, and this is reflected in the final development
- this commitment to health and wellbeing comes from the top – leadership is crucial for doing things differently
- this leadership is backed up by resources, tools and mechanisms that allow for innovation across realistic timeframes
- improving health and wellbeing outcomes often, but not always, overlaps with environmental benefits such as reducing carbon use
- there is a high degree of participation from people who will live, or are living, in the development, combined with a vision for what the scheme should achieve.

Case studies

Vauban, Freiburg, Germany

GWL Terrein, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Manor Road, Swindon, England

Bluebell Park, Knowsley, England

Examples from Northern Ireland:

Connswater Community Greenway

Growing spaces, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Caffrey Hill development, Clanmil Housing Association

KidsSpace, Belfast Healthy Cities

Vauban, Freiburg



Source: [Vauban Actuel](#)



Source: TCPA

Vauban is an urban extension to Freiburg that is home to around 5000 people and 600 jobs. It has extensive areas which are virtually car-free; about 40 per cent of households across a range of incomes do not own a car. The area is home to a range of uses, including employment, and there are a number of alternative ways of moving around. The low car use means that children can play in public spaces including the streets. There is a focus on sustainable environmental design, on developing a local economy and on building the social connections between residents. There is a high degree of involvement of residents in the planning process, for example, designing local green spaces.

Key lessons

- A strong champion (for 20 years the council's head of planning)
- Progressive and comprehensive land use transport strategy based on walking, cycling and public transport, including new tram connections upfront as part of new urban extensions
- Long-term plan with tools to implement it
- Commitment to sustainable development (especially low energy), which has strong overlaps with improving health
- Strong and meaningful community engagement that has allowed residents to have an influence

More information

[Delivering better places in Scotland: a guide to learning from broader experience](#) (Scottish Government)

[Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism](#) (Academy of Urbanism, 2012)

[What is a healthy urban environment?](#) (University of West of England)

[Vauban, Freiburg](#)

GWL Terrein Urban Eco-area, Amsterdam



Source: GWL Terrein

This is an urban infill development for 600 residential units for approximately 1400 people about three miles from the centre of Amsterdam. The local community and future residents were involved in planning the new development. The development is designed along the principles of ecological living and includes areas for local food growing and elements to increase biodiversity, such as a number of bird boxes incorporated into the design. It has been built on the site of an old waterworks and makes good use of the existing buildings to help create a distinctive sense of place for the development while also being very well connected via public transport to the rest of the city. Only one in six dwellings have a car parking space; other facilities include a car pool (electric cars), a bicycle hire scheme and bike trailers for loan.

Key lessons

- Local residents involved in the design and development of the project, pushing for a new development approach based on car-free living and community cohesion
- The umbrella organization Koepelvereniging was created to promote the original intentions of the development, funded by local residents and housing associations
- The City of Amsterdam has implemented many policies to encourage cycling and walking and to reduce car use with GWL Terrein residents having a 50% bicycle mode share compared to the City's 30%
- The area is well-connected to existing transportation modes
- The basic principles for high sustainability standards for the sites were set out in the local planning document – Urban Planning Schedule of Requirements (SPVE) – in 1993

More information

- [Europe's Vibrant New Local Car\(bon\) Communities](#) (ITDP, 2011)
- The [GWL Terrein website](#) includes a range of useful background
- [University of West of England](#) study tour reports

[GWL Terrein Urban Eco-area, Amsterdam](#)

Manor Road Community Garden, Swindon



Opened in 2013 this development of 22 energy-efficient affordable homes in Swindon, between Bristol and London, includes a food growing community garden. The garden has helped create a social hub for people to meet, while bringing the many benefits of home-grown produce to residents. The site is a joint venture between Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and Raglan Housing, local residents and volunteers.

Key lessons

- Effective collaboration between Swindon Council, the housing provider (Raglan Housing) and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has facilitated integrated thinking across a range of health considerations
- Homes are designed to the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 (a recognised national standard for design and construction in England which has a health and wellbeing category) with some homes designed to meet Lifetime Homes standards
- The Council has a Sustainable Design and Construction planning document adopted in 2007 as part of its suite of local planning documents, which recognises the wider benefits of sustainability for producing healthier environments

More information

- [Planning Sustainable Cities and Community Food Growing](#) (Sustain, 2014)

[Manor Road Community Garden, Swindon](#)

[Bluebell Park, Knowsley](#)



Source: [First Ark](#)

The social housing provider in Knowsley, Knowsley Housing Trust (part of First Ark), is developing a £14.4 million extra care housing called Bluebell Park in Huyton. The scheme is supported by Knowsley Council, which sold the land to the housing provider at below market rate.

This has enabled First Ark to significantly increase the quality of housing in the area and helps to meet pressing housing need for older people. The scheme includes 122 apartments and nine bungalows, with a range of communal facilities, for people over 55, which will be available for the residents of scheme and the wider community. The objective is to create a hub for residents, ensuring that the scheme is an integral part of the wider community, and ensures that residents continue to feel a part of the local neighbourhood rather than isolated from it.

First Ark's model builds in long-term savings of investing in quality extra care development (to reduce the need for social care packages later on). On another development it estimates that the savings from this approach will be in excess of £1 million annually.

Key lessons

- A commitment to demonstrating the long-term value of upfront investment to reduce health needs and costs in later years
- A commitment to develop quality specialist housing for older people, to help meet shortfalls identified in council housing and planning policy
- Collaboration: the housing association's extra care schemes would not have been successful when bidding for funding if Housing, Health and Planning had not been working together and aligning key strategies

More information

- [Bluebell Park website](#)

Developing Community Growing Spaces Northern Ireland Housing Executive



As a major social landlord, managing nearly 90,000 properties across numerous estates and 1,420 hectares of open space within these estates, and engaging directly with around four hundred community groups, NIHE views it as important to encourage involvement, diversity and social enterprise. NIHE recognises a number of benefits from food growing, including increased social contact resulting in increased social inclusion; appreciation of how food is produced, as part of encouraging a nutritious diet; improved access to healthy, affordable food supplies; regular outdoor activity leading to improved physical and mental health as well as new skills, and preservation of green space in urban area. The organisation sees itself as having an important role through its land asset, its links with local groups and its role in building healthy, sustainable communities.

Since 2009, over 20 sites for community growing have been provided on NIHE owned land across Northern Ireland, with a focus on disadvantaged areas. The management of these has varied from leasing land to a lead agency, through the creation of growing space with direct support from NIHE, including community led initiatives. Examples of the latter range from allotments to provision of raised beds within blocks of flats, where space is at a premium.

Results of the initiative have been very positive. Users of the growing spaces report developing new skills, making friends and also acquiring healthier eating habits. In many areas, residents have set up gardening clubs, which not only offer a social network, but also create opportunities for fundraising. Residents typically report raised pride in their area, and in many areas growing projects have been found to significantly strengthen local networks, increasing a sense of community.

[Northern Ireland Housing Executive](#)

KidsSpace Belfast Healthy Cities



Children are a significant group in society. Child friendly environments are an important signal that children are valued members of society. In addition, child friendly environments in town and cities can help support economic development and regeneration by supporting and attracting families. 'Child Friendly Cities' has been a core aspect of Belfast Healthy Cities programme of work since 2011.

In Belfast, the city centre could significantly benefit from more child friendly space, where children are welcome and free to use a space in their own ways. KidsSpace was developed as a model aimed at testing what such space could look like. In addition, it was an opportunity to gather views and information from participants through consultation. KidsSpace was originally initiated in 2011 as a one off event, 6 of the large scale events have now been hosted.

The events have been held in various large outdoor inner city spaces and also in indoor spaces such as an unused unit in a shopping centre. A number of activities were created to help the children utilise the space. Creative Space included community artists who facilitated small arts and crafts; Active Space feature physical activities including Smooth Bikes, spinning bikes, obstacle courses and games facilitated by sports coaches; Free Space encourage free play and included giant games such as Connect 4, Jenga, building blocks and large portable playground equipment.

The KidsSpace events have been extremely popular in the city with a number of the events being attended by 1000 children and adults. Feedback from the parents, grandparents and children has been very positive and reinforced the importance of child friendly aspects in a city centre and that child friendly aspect benefit all ages for example to give children a safe space to play and share and also to potentially support local businesses by increasing footfall throughout the city.

Feedback gathered at the events is that KidsSpace provided a useful model for child friendly space. Families also felt that much can be done to existing under used space. Belfast Healthy Cities are aware that the concept has influenced other projects in the city and indeed the incorporation of child friendly regeneration initiative throughout Belfast. Belfast Healthy Cities have begun to use the feedback gathered at the KidsSpace events to help inform a more strategic child friendly approach across Belfast.

[Belfast Healthy Cities](#)

Caffrey Hill Community Space Clanmil Housing Association



Clanmil believes that a good home is about more than bricks and mortar, and aims to create settled, harmonious communities where people are proud to live and raise their families.

Caffrey Hill is a 166 home social housing scheme in West Belfast completed in 2013. As part of the scheme Clanmil created a community space incorporating play facilities.

The purpose of the community space was to encourage the new tenants, who came from a range of areas and backgrounds, to come together in play and leisure thereby building and helping to maintain good neighbour relationships. The space was also intended to help reduce the potential for nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Local children and communities were involved in planning the space, in partnership with Groundwork.

One year on, the space is used for community events and is the focal point around which these events are planned. Through these events, the tenants have taken ownership of the space and help look after it, actively discouraging vandalism and dog fouling. The space provides children moving into the development the opportunity to mix, to get to know each other through play and to develop friendships.

The community space project at Caffrey Hill was a first for Clanmil and the organisation states it has learned important lessons about the benefits of incorporating community space in family housing schemes of scale and with regard to how to go about developing successful community spaces in other new developments currently at the planning stage.

Due to the success of this initiative Clanmil will continue to pioneer play space in our housing developments. The organization has developed and is now implementing a new Play Strategy, whereby the provision of open space for play will be incorporated into plans for new developments of a certain density.

The inherent benefits experienced at Caffrey Hill and the value provided to residents have justified the initial costs and ongoing management costs.

[Clanmil Housing Association](#)

Connswater Community Greenway



In 2005 East Belfast Partnership (EBP) recognised the need for a significant intervention in east Belfast that would impact on:

- The health and general well-being of the people
- Improvements to the physical environment
- Community cohesion

The idea of bringing the rivers in east Belfast back into use had been discussed for a number of years and the Connswater Community Greenway (CCG) concept was developed in 2006-07 as it was agreed that a number of the desired outcomes for the area could be achieved through this project. In 2007, CCG received funding of £23.5 million from the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks programme.

It is one of three UK projects (and the only Northern Ireland scheme) to gain funding from this source. Additional funding was received from Belfast City Council (£4.2m) and the Department for Social Development (£3.2m).

The Connswater Community Greenway will create a 9km linear park through east Belfast, following the course of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers, connecting the open and green spaces and cleaning the Connswater River. The Greenway will reconnect communities and it will create vibrant, attractive, safe and accessible parkland for leisure, recreation and community events and activities.

It will provide immediate benefit to the 40,000 people living in the wards adjacent to the river and will deliver benefits from the Castlereagh Hills to Belfast Lough and beyond. It will directly improve the living environment, reinstating a valuable amenity for local people and provide opportunities for improving health and well-being. The Project will act as a catalyst for physical and economic development.

Following two years of severe flooding in east Belfast, flood alleviation works were incorporated into the project in partnership with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). Elements of the East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme (£11m) will now be developed alongside the CCG project. 1,700 homes will have a significantly reduced risk of flooding from the rivers as a result of this.

Key Physical outputs are:

- A 9km linear park, a wildlife corridor
- 26 new or improved bridges and crossings
- Serving 22 schools and colleges
- 16kms of foot and cycle paths
- 5kms of clean rivers
- 6 tourism and heritage trails
- A civic square

The project has been divided into two construction phases. Phase 1 works concentrated on Orangefield and Victoria Parks and will be completed September 2015. Phase 2 works will commence Autumn 2015 and will be completed late 2016.

To date the following achievements have been made by the project:

Community engagement- Engagement with the community has been strong since the concept stage of the project. Local community stakeholders were involved in design workshops and have had the opportunity to influence more detailed design in their area. Information sessions and stakeholder forums have kept local community and residents informed about the project. Community activities and events have been important locally to engage with various people and to encourage use of the spaces that are being developed. Through this a supportive and loyal volunteer group has developed.

Improvements to date-

- 3.5km improved/ new paths
- 5 new/improved bridges and crossings (including the landmark Sam Thompson Bridge)
- 344 native trees planted
- 95% engagement with key stakeholder groups
- 3 tourism 7 heritage trails developed
- 1 community garden established

Additional investment-

- Queen's University Belfast, Centre of Excellence successfully received £1m funding to research the CCG project and its impact- Physical Activity and the Rejuvenation of the Connswater (PARC) Study
- National Lottery- Public Art Programme through the Arts Council NI £48k funding received by EBP for façade art along the CCG route
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Tourism Development Scheme £285k funding received by EBP to develop a visitor centre for east Belfast

Awards-

- Belfast Healthy City Healthier Environments Award 2014 for Avoniel Community Garden (Highly Commended)
- BURA The Waterways Renaissance Award for Partnership 2009 (Winner)
- BURA The Waterways Renaissance Award for Strategy & Action Planning 2009 (Runner-up)
- RTP/RSBP NI Sustainable Planning Award 2008 (Runner-up)

[Connswater Community Greenway](#)

**This resource is part of a series
Reuniting Planning and Health- Planning for Healthy Communities.**

**All five publications are available to download
at
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